

funeral industry

The funeral industry is concerned with the handling and burial of the dead and, often, with arrangements for the conduct of funerals. The industry is sizable, earning an annual gross income of some \$6 billion and employing 77,000 persons, many of whom are licensed funeral directors or embalmers and work primarily through the 15,000 funeral homes in the United States. (Many Western countries handle funerals through institutions analogous to those in the United States; in other parts of the world FUNERAL CUSTOMS differ widely.) For a fee that is decided on in negotiations between the bereaved family and the funeral home, the home undertakes to remove the body of the deceased from the place of death, to prepare the body for burial, to provide rooms where mourners can meet and where a service may be held, and to make burial arrangements. Sometimes, the body will be embalmed and cosmetic attention paid to the face, to make it more seemly for public viewing. The home also supplies the casket.

Every state enforces its own regulations governing the practices of funeral homes and the disposition of bodies. Nevertheless, the industry has been the subject of investigation by government agencies, notably the Federal Trade Commission (FTC). In 1982 the FTC issued a regulation, which became effective in mid-1983, requiring funeral directors to disclose their prices and to offer customers their choice of services. It also prohibited embalming without the family's permission, except under certain circumstances.

In recent years the increased use of CREMATION rather than burial has led to the formation of memorial societies, nonprofit membership organizations that contract for cremations at low cost to members. Many Americans now belong to these societies, prearranging their own funerals.

Bibliography: Carlson, Lisa, *Caring For Your Own Dead* (1987); Farrell, J.J., *Inventing the American Way of Death, 1830-1920* (1980); Mitford, Jessica, *The American Way of Death*, 2d ed. (1963); Shipley, R.R., *The Consumer's Guide to Death, Dying and Bereavement* (1982).